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Director of the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM
E-Mail: bbrittingham@neasc.org

Deputy Director of the Commission
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND
E-Mail: pobrien@neasc.org

Associate Director of the Commission
ROBERT C. FROH
E-Mail: rfroh@neasc.org

Associate Director of the Commission
LOUISE A. ZAK
E-Mail: lzak@neasc.org

Assistant Director of the Commission
JULIE L. ALIG
E-Mail: jalig@neasc.org

January 14, 2010

Dr. Daniel Mark Fogel
President
University of Vermont
349 Waterman Building
85 South Prospect Street
Burlington, VT 05405-0160

Dear President Fogel:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 19, 2009, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Vermont:

that University of Vermont be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Spring 2014;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University give emphasis to its success in:

- 1) implementing its strategic plan, supported by resource allocation and informed by links to student learning assessment;
- 2) developing a set of general education requirements that embody the "UVM Graduate," along with assessment plans and tools to measure the effectiveness of the requirements;
- 3) implementing the requirements of the Voluntary System of Accountability and associated processes for assessing student learning over the course of the baccalaureate degree in the various degree programs;
- 4) identifying areas of academic strength for targeted investment, with the goal of moving the University toward greater national prominence;
- 5) achieving a balanced operating budget;

- 6) resolving issues of technology infrastructure and support including information security and charge-back practices for technology services;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2019.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

The University of Vermont (UVM) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*. We commend the University for achieving an appropriate level of stability in administrative leadership, supported by deliberate actions of the governing board, that have allowed the institution to develop a sustained agenda in support of its mission and aspirations. In recent years the University leadership, faculty, and staff have succeeded in facing significant challenges related to the institution's size, level of state support, and a period of administrative instability. It has done so with a focused mission, the ability to plan and execute, and the capacity to attract strong students and retain good faculty. We also take favorable note of the University's commitment to assessment and public accountability and the discernible influence this work is having on the institution, including a renewed effort to ensure that undergraduate students receive a coherent general education program consistent with University learning goals, regardless of their academic home.

Commission policy requires a fifth-year interim report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. Its purpose is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution's current status in keeping with the policy on Periodic Review. In addition to the information included in all fifth-year reports the University is asked, in Spring 2014, to report on six matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, *Public Disclosure*, *Library and Other Information Resources*, and *Physical and Technological Resources*.

We commend the University for the participatory process it used to develop its current strategic plan, Strategic Plan 2009-2013: *Sustaining the Advance*. We look forward to learning through the interim report in 2014 about the successful implementation of the plan and how the University will have been able to link the results of student learning assessment to the plan, particularly for the goals in Academic Programs and Student Experience, and to support the major goals of the plan through resource allocation, demonstrating the institution's "demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.3).

The absence to date of a university-wide general education requirement has raised concerns about student learning and how to assess the common learning experiences of UVM undergraduate students. We concur with the team's observation that the current distribution requirement system with its considerable variation among the University makes it difficult for students to navigate or even understand degree requirements. We applaud the University's commitment to address this issue, consistent with its developing culture of assessment, and we anticipate learning of its success in the Spring 2014 report. Our standard on *The Academic Program* is pertinent here:

The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.15).

Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind (4.18).

The University of Vermont is widely recognized for its leadership in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). The Commission understands that the VSA will evolve with experience and new developments and looks forward to the interim report as a means of learning of the University's success in implementing the VSA and associated processes for assessing students' learning over the course of their undergraduate studies in the various majors. Our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Public Disclosure* are relevant here:

The institution implements and supports a systematic and broad-based approach to the assessment of student learning focused on educational improvement through understanding what and how students are learning through their academic program and, as appropriate, through experiences outside the classroom. This approach is based on a clear statement or statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The approach provides useful information to help the institution understand what and how students are learning, improve the experiences provided for students, and assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded. Institutional support is provided for these activities (4.44).

The institution publishes a description of the size and characteristics of the student body, the campus setting, the availability of academic and other support services, the range of co-curricular and non-academic opportunities available to students; and those institutional learning and physical resources from which a student can reasonably be expected to benefit (10.9).

The institution publishes statements of its goals for students' education and the success of students in achieving those goals. Information on student success includes rates of retention and graduation and other measures of student success appropriate to institutional mission. As appropriate, recent information on passage rates for licensure examinations is also published (10.10).

The institution publishes information about the total cost of education, including the availability of financial aid and the typical length of study. The expected amount of student debt upon graduation is provided to help students and prospective students make informed decisions (10.11).

Given the University's size and relative financial standing, we understand the logic of identifying broad areas of academic strength to target for investment as the University seeks greater national prominence. Given the potential impact of this initiative on the University, we applaud the highly participatory process and also the use of an outside perspective in reviewing the results. The interim report will afford the University an opportunity to update the Commission on the success of this endeavor, consistent with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution undertakes short- and long-term planning, including realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.2).

We note that the University has taken significant measures to address very difficult financial challenges, including state support of only 7.5% of the operating budget and the existence of a structural deficit estimated at \$9 million for 2011. We commend the progress from recent annual operating deficits of \$15 million two years ago to a projected shortfall of \$3-\$4 million for the current year, and we are heartened by the leadership's commitment to restore a balanced budget, by implementing a "realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit" (9.8). We look forward to learning of the institution's success through the Spring 2014 interim report.

The Commission is pleased to note the variety of important and useful technological services offered by the University's Enterprise Technology Services. We support the team's observations that the University would be well served by a review of two elements regarding support and security. Operating in a highly decentralized environment in a complex distributed support model, the approximately 100 chargeback categories may have privileged detail over assuring the University's "efficient ability to plan, administer, and evaluate its program and services" (7.11). Also, we concur with the team's observations that the University would benefit from a review of its current staffing and procedures to "[ensure] the reliability of the systems, the integrity and security of data, and the privacy of individuals" (8.5). We ask that these matters be addressed in the 2014 interim report.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2019 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Vermont and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, and Dr. Philip E. Austin, team chair, during its deliberations.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Ian Boyce. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

Dr. Daniel Mark Fogel
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The Commission hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Elsa M. Nuñez

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Enclosure

cc: Mr. Ian Boyce
Visiting Team